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Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?

by Walter A. McDougall

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Abstract: Two big issues that scholars and strategists need to address are simply: does grand strategy have to be articulated for it to be said to exist at all; and if not, can grand strategy be said to move a nation even when that nation's fluctuating roster of (often competent) leaders are unsure as to why they do anything? My task here is that of a rapporteur and provocateur raising issues on which we may need to reach some consensus.

In spring 2003, following the last lecture in my survey course on U.S. diplomatic history since 1776, a brilliant, inquisitive student approached me in the hall to ask a final, confidential question. She said that my course helped her appreciate, as never before, how swiftly the United States had become the mightiest nation ever, with unprecedented military, economic, and cultural influence. But how long would it last? How long did I think the United States could stay on top?

At first I was tongue-tied, because I was loath to inject a future national leader with either complacency or despair. Then an answer occurred to me. It all depends on whether the United States is as exceptional as we like to believe. If the United States follows the pattern of all previous powers, then demographic or technological trends, new foreign threats, strategic folly, overextension, domestic decadence, or sheer loss of will must hurl it into decline, perhaps within fifty years. If, however, our institutions, values, and national character really do amount to a new order for the ages, a potent mix enabling the United States to reinvent itself and force other nations to adapt to the challenges posed by us, then the republic may stay on its asymptotic trajectory. I stopped there, but as I walked to my office I recalled Arnold J. Toynbee's historical law to the effect that empires die by suicide, not murder.

As recently as a decade ago, the buzzwords in our foreign policy discourse included new world order, end of history, unipolar moment, benevolent hegemony, indispensable nation, assertive multilateralism, and Washington consensus. How fast are the mighty fallen, through strategic and

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financial malpractice, into a reprise of the terrible 1970s when the buzzwords were imperial overstretch, exhaustion, and decline. Does another "Morning in America" await us so long as we keep faith with ourselves, or has the United States reached a climacteric and entered into a long British-style decline? In other words, is American exceptionalism the source of an energy, ingenuity, resilience, and civic virtue that propels our nation ever upward? Or is a complacent *belief* in American exceptionalism the source of a profligacy, adventurism, disregard for experience, and civic vice that portends a decline and fall? Angelo Codevilla, who says that what passes for strategy in the U.S. government is mostly wishful or sloppy thinking, made the same point in operational terms. "Because doing the right thing is important to Americans as to no other people, American politics is like politics nowhere else. . . . Basing statecraft on the American people's penchant for trying to do the right thing, as did Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, brings forth awesome energy. . . . But using the American people's righteousness as a propellant for private dreams, as did [Woodrow] Wilson, or as cover for tergiversation, as did George W. Bush, is ruinous."[1]

Why do I begin on such a skeptical, gloomy note? I think it is because my training was that of an old-school European historian, which gave me an outside vantage point from which to view U.S. shibboleths more objectively than do U.S. historians. I suspect my training in European history also inclines me to think about foreign policy in terms of realism, balance of power, contingency, tragedy, irony, folly, unintended consequences, and systemic interactions—all of which are foreign if not repugnant to U.S. citizens. Finally, I am a Vietnam veteran skeptical of nation- and state-building, winning hearts and minds, and making the world over in the United States' image. As FPRI's Paul Dickler recently pointed out, I asked explicitly in the 1997 book *Promised Land, Crusader State*, "can Americans be better Iraqis than Iraqis themselves, or presume to tell Chinese how to be better Chinese? If we try, we can only be poorer Americans."[2] That book was well received except at *The Weekly Standard* and other venues where neoconservatives were already calling for the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein and a muscular foreign policy in the name of "national greatness." After 9/11 they got their way while I dropped out of sight to study early American history. To be sure, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 provided me with a perfect case study to impress on students how hard it can be to discern motive in history. Thus, we were variously told but with equal conviction that Operation Iraqi Freedom was "all about" oil, Israel, the war on terror, weapons of mass destruction, the Rumsfeld Pentagon's new way of war,

[1] Angelo M. Codevilla, *Advice to War Presidents: A Remedial Course in Statecraft* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 273.

[2] Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 220.

neoconservative ideology, the Bush family feud with Saddam, Karl Rove's re-election calendar, or democratizing the Middle East. That leads one to ask whether the Iraq invasion was doomed because too many constituencies had too many irons in the fire.

That bears on the subject at hand: can the United States do grand strategy? I assume that this does *not* mean, can the *American people* do grand strategy, because an easy answer would be, sure they can and usually very poorly. Rather I assume the title means, can the relevant agencies of the U.S. federal government plan, coordinate, and execute grand strategy with sufficient competence to secure the nation and defend its vital interests. That is a complex question that has inspired a recent spate of diagnoses of what ails U.S. strategic planning and what prescriptions are indicated.[3] I do not intend to choose among those expert assessments, much less add to them since I claim no authority on the subject of grand strategy apart from whatever U.S. diplomatic history can teach. In short, I plead *non possumus* and absolve myself of the obligation to take any controversial position. Instead, I imagine my task merely as that of a rapporteur and provocateur raising issues on which we may need to reach some consensus before we can agree on whether the United States can do grand strategy and, if so, what that strategy ought to be at the present time.

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Two recent quotations may serve to introduce those issues.

> We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth. Across the generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security, and the calling of our time.

So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.[4]

[3] See inter alia Aaron L. Friedberg, "Strengthening Strategic Planning," *Washington Quarterly* 31:1 (2007), pp. 47-60; Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Andrew F. Krepenivich and Barry D. Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence: Strategy for the Long Haul* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009); and Codevilla, *Advice to War Presidents*. For a standard classic defining the field in general see John M. Collins, *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1983).

[4] George W. Bush, "Second Inaugural Address" (Jan. 20, 2007) accessed Sep. 29, 2009) at http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres67.html.

That, needless to say, was the gist of George W. Bush's 2007 Second Inaugural Address, which a certain White House insider pithily called "a crazy speech."

If it was crazy, perhaps the second quotation suggests a good reason why.

> Strategic planning for American foreign policy is dead, dying, or moribund. This, at least, has been the assessment of several commentators and policy-makers in recent years. Michèle Flournoy and Shawn Brimley observed in 2006, "For a country that continues to enjoy an unrivaled global position, it is both remarkable and disturbing that the United States has no truly effective strategy planning process for national security." At an academic conference in 2007, a former director of the State Department's policy planning staff complained that "six years after 9/11, we still don't have a grand strategy". . . . [And] Council on Foreign Relations president Richard Haass argues that the United States has "squandered" its post-cold war opportunity, concluding, "Historians will not judge the United States well for how it has used these twenty years."

That lament introduces a new Brookings Institution volume, edited by Daniel Drexner, on the forgotten art of grand strategy.[5]

Such breathtaking vitality in terms of strategic ambition combined with the certifiable death of strategic planning would suggest a certain disconnect between the muscles and brain of the sole superpower: a disconnect which, Drezner writes, was just as evident in the prideful "ad hoc-ery" of the Clinton years as in the prideful crusade of the second Bush years. Has that disconnect always, or usually existed, or not? Most contemporary critics agree with Aaron Friedberg's judgment that the United States "has lost the capacity to conduct serious, sustained national strategic planning," which implies that it once had that capacity. Of course, Friedberg and most others hold that the United States had that capacity during the Cold War, beginning with George Marshall's 1947 promotion of Policy Planning in the State Department and President Dwight Eisenhower's 1953 promotion of strategic planning in the Pentagon. The grand strategy designed and executed over the long haul was Containment, hence the corollary that ever since 1991 the United States has been awaiting another George Kennan to tell us what new grand strategy ought to discipline and focus U.S. energies. Thus, there is a tendency in our strategic discourse, illustrated by the Brookings volume, to assume that Containment represented the norm and post-cold war drift the aberration; to assume, in short, that the United States can do grand strategy, did do grand strategy, and thus needs only to *recover* the capacity displayed by the "greatest generation" who were "present at the creation" in the heroic years of the late 1940s.[6]

A broader *tour d'horizon* of U.S. history, however, might suggest otherwise, as illustrated by another glaring juxtaposition of quotes.

[5] Daniel W. Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), pp. 3-4.

[6] Aaron L. Friedberg, "Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning, in ibid., pp. 84-97.

"There are two men who have imparted to American foreign policy a tendency that is still being followed today; the first is Washington and the second Jefferson. . . ." Their principles of neutrality, no permanent alliances, and no granting or soliciting special privileges from foreign nations,

> so plain and just as to be easily understood by the people, have greatly simplified the foreign policy of the United States. As the Union takes no part in the affairs of Europe, it has, properly speaking, no foreign interests to discuss, since it has, as yet, no powerful neighbors on the American continent. . . . The foreign policy of the United States is eminently expectant; it consists more in abstaining than in acting.
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> It is therefore very difficult to ascertain, at present, what degree of sagacity the American democracy will display in the conduct of the foreign policy of the country; upon this point its adversaries as well as its friends must suspend their judgment. As for myself, I do not hesitate to say that it is especially in the conduct of their foreign relations that democracies appear to me decidedly inferior to other governments. . . . Foreign politics demand scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar in a democracy; they require, on the contrary, the perfect use of almost all those in which it is deficient. Democracy is favorable to the increase of the internal resources of a state; it diffuses wealth and comfort . . . [but] a democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await the consequences with patience.[7]

Democracies, especially the wild and vast American one, do not do grand strategy, or else cannot do it very well or for very long: such was the famous judgment rendered by Tocqueville 170 years ago. What then, does one make of the even more famous conclusion to his chapter on the "three races" populating the continent?

> It must not, then, be imagined that the impulse of the British race in the New World can be arrested. The dismemberment of the Union and the hostilities that might ensue, the abolition of republican institutions and the tyrannical government that might succeed, may retard this impulse, but they cannot prevent the people from ultimately fulfilling their destinies. . . . [Free immigration, continental expanse, and spirit of enterprise will overcome all.] Thus, in the midst of the uncertain future one event at least is sure. At a period that may be said to be near, for we are speaking of the life of a nation, the Anglo-Americans alone will cover the immense space contained between the polar regions and the tropics, extending from the coasts of the Atlantic to those of the Pacific Ocean. . . . The time will therefore come when 150 million men will be living in North America, equal in condition, all belonging to one family, owing their origin to the same cause, and preserving the same civilization, the same language, the same religion, the same habits, the same manners, and imbued with the same opinions, propagated under the same forms. The rest is uncertain, but this is certain; and it is a fact new to the world, a fact that the imagination strives in vain to grasp.
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> There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans. . . . The conquests of the American are gained by the plowshare; those

[7] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage, 1945), pp. 240-45; for other editions just see volume 1, chapter 13.

> of the Russian by the sword. The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.[8]

Bottom line: in the age of Jacksonian Democracy, Manifest Destiny, and escalating Sectional Crisis, Tocqueville described a nation that was uninterested in practicing grand strategy as the rest of the civilized human race understood it—hence the Great Rule obeyed since Washington's time—and yet was destined to know grand strategic success in terms of growth, power, and security, that no other state in the world save perhaps Russia could match. Talk about disconnect! Can it be that the United States flourished over its first century despite, or because of, its government's lack of any self-conscious grand strategy? Or can the elements, however passive, of nineteenth-century American foreign and military policy be rightly deemed grand strategy? Or can a civil faith—faith that divine Providence, historical progress, or one's own righteousness mystically guarantees the national destiny—function as a sort of force multiplier or self-fulfilling prophecy, in which case strategies based on amoral power politics and Machiavellian cunning can amount to a suicidal tempting of fate?

According to Tocqueville's observations, the U.S. government needed to do very little to realize the national destiny and the only way it could fumble it away was by gratuitous interventions or invitations that risked making North America once again a target of the European Great Powers. The unilateral neutralism of Washington's Great Rule and Jefferson's "no entangling alliances," the ideological prudence of John Quincy Adams's "not going abroad in search of monsters to destroy," the regional and republican separatism of Monroe's Doctrine, and the expansionist Manifest Destiny heralded by Jacksonians might appear to be coordinated, mutually reinforcing principles of a brilliant national strategy exploiting the United States' asymmetrical diplomatic, economic, ideological, and military advantages in that era to maximal effect. It is just that they do not look like grand strategy because nobody outside the Prussian General Staff and British Admiralty or East India Company thought in those terms in the mid-nineteenth century or (if they did) expressed their grand strategic ideas in so many words.

Hence, two big issues that scholars and strategists need to address are simply: does grand strategy have to be articulated for it to be said to exist at all; and if not, can grand strategy be said to move a nation even when that nation's fluctuating roster of mostly incompetent leaders are unsure as to why they do anything? In other words, was Auguste Comte correct when he

[8] Ibid., pp. 450-52 (volume 1, chapter 18).

insisted that demography is destiny, or Robert Strausz-Hupé when he insisted that you cannot argue with geography? We quote such lines to good effect, but are they operationally true in the sense of being impersonal forces that move events? One need not be a rigid determinist to grant that, especially in retrospect, there is often a logic to strategic interactions that the players sensed, if at all, by sheer instinct. Experts at poker or bridge call that "card sense." Talleyrand called it the art of statecraft to foresee the inevitable and expedite its occurrence. Bismarck called politics the art of the possible and statecraft to hear "the steps of God sounding through events, then leap up and grasp the hem of His garment." Kissinger called that people blessed whose leaders can look destiny in the eye without flinching, but also without trying to play God. What are they trying to describe? It seems as if successful grand strategy requires both acquiescence and aspiration, observation and imagination, prudence and audacity, prideful mastery of men and humble service of Providence, not to mention the meticulous groundwork, assessment of the correlation of forces, and deft timing whose strategic fruits appear, to the victimized and the envious, as contemptible luck.

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To those who doubt the U.S. government can do grand strategy well (something on which "beltway bandits" and critical bloggers seem to agree),[9] the on-line STRATFOR Geopolitical Diary had a definitive answer. In anticipation of the 2009 Fourth of July, it posted an essay celebrating what it confidently professed to be our overarching, automatic, and now 230 year-old grand strategy. It began (rightly) by tracing U.S. strategic ideas back to eighteenth-century Britain inasmuch as the thirteen colonies could aspire to their mother country's geopolitical advantages as an insular, maritime, commercial power benefitting from the rivalries and balance of power prevailing among its continental Europe rivals. Another idea it failed to mention, however, was the impressive, exemplary, hard-won unity among England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. That was what freed the Crown, Parliament, Bank of England, and Board of Trade to mobilize national resources for the pursuit of power and wealth abroad. During and after 1776, the Founders of the United States had the United Kingdom (and the United Provinces of the Netherlands) very much on their minds.

STRATFOR went on to postulate the existence of "five core rules" or "geopolitical imperatives" that have allegedly "determined the behavior" of the United States. The first was to secure strategic depth by pushing inland from the Atlantic coast, crossing the Appalachians, and in the 1783 treaty of peace with Britain, obtaining title to all the land east of the Mississippi. The second was to expand that strategic depth across the continent. It was

[9] For instance, see http://zenhuber.blogspot.com/2009/09/another-krock-of-krepinevich.html.

accomplished through the Louisiana Purchase, its successful defense in the War of 1812, the subsequent treaties demilitarizing the U.S.-Canadian boundary, and especially in the Mexican War of 1846-48, which yielded all of Texas, California, and the land in between.

The third step, says STRATFOR, was "to gain control of the ocean approaches" which was accomplished, in the Caribbean and Pacific alike, by the dawn of the twentieth century. "Once a nation controls its approaches, the next logical step—the fourth imperative—is to reach farther and control the oceans themselves." Of course, that strategic genius Uncle Sam achieved that by the end of World War II, securing its grip on the oceans through naval hegemony and alliances with littoral states in Europe and Asia. All that remained was the fifth imperative, which was to prevent any one power from dominating the Eurasian land mass. Needless to say, that mandated the successful Containment and Deterrence of the Soviet bloc. STRATFOR concludes: "These five strategic imperatives are not found anywhere in the Constitution of laws of the United States. But every one of the country's 44 presidents, regardless of intention, has conformed to them, compelled by the inexorable logic of geography. . . . And the same geopolitical imperatives that drove these actions will shape American efforts into the future—just as they have since 1776."[10]

How credible is that? I would certainly dispute the assertion that every single president conformed to this programmatic template. On the contrary, presidents who have given evidence of strategic vision are a decided minority. But the very notion of U.S. traditions of foreign policy, such as I developed in *Promised Land, Crusader State*, implies continuities even, or especially, when the president and secretary of state are ignorant, distracted, or running on auto-pilot because no crisis beckons. Thus, I argued that (1) Exceptionalism, narrowly defined as the defense, not risky export, of U.S. liberty, plus (2) Unilateralism admonished in Washington's Farewell and Jefferson's Inaugural, plus (3) the American System of States envisioned by the Monroe Doctrine, plus (4) continental Expansion imagined as an idealistic, pioneer-driven "manifest destiny," but enabled by a diplomatic and military "manifest design" begun by Washington and Benjamin Franklin during the War of Independence and climaxing in the Oregon Treaty and Mexican War under James K. Polk, comprised a mutually reinforcing body of strategic principles that guaranteed the nation's stupendous growth against any contingency except civil war (and even managed to surmount that emergency).[11]

[10] STRATFOR Geopolitical Diary, "America's Indivisible Imperatives" (July 2, 2009), accessed July 22, 2009) at http://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical_diary.

[11] The hardball war and diplomacy of the Polk administration that belied the benign, idealistic "Manifest Destiny" school of U.S. expansion is summarized by McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, pp. 76-98, and described in depth by Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2003), and David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1973).

Indeed, one useful measure of sound grand strategy could be derived from the successful example of the United States' rise to world power and the failed examples of Germany and Japan. Paul Kennedy elegantly styled the latter "middle powers" seeking to break into the ranks of the world powers seemingly destined to loom over the coming twentieth century: the Russian, British, and American empires. Kennedy underscored their importance by discarding the usual periodization with breaks at 1871, 1890, and 1914, in favor of a section beginning in 1885, when Meiji Japan and Imperial Germany began questing for overseas empire.[12] In two world wars, their excellent general staffs backed by fully supportive regimes conducted military operations at the highest level and won stunning triumphs. But they brought utter ruin in the end because they wrongly assumed that sufficient operational success at the level of strategy could transform realities at the level of grand strategy. My definition of sound grand strategy, therefore, simply postulates the opposite: an equation of ends and means so sturdy that it triumphs despite serial setbacks at the level of strategy, operations, and campaigns. The classic example is Allied grand strategy during World War II.[13]

Of course, throughout the nineteenth century the United States was so blessed that except for the Civil War Americans could realize imperial ambitions on a pittance. No wonder they developed the habit which FPRI's Harvey Sicherman calls "cheap hawkery." Moreover, Americans could defend what they had and grasp what they wanted without too much aforethought. To be sure, the authors of our grand traditions knew what they were doing or, just as important, refraining from doing, and why. As early as 1789, Alexander Hamilton wrote in *The Federalist* No. 8: "If we are wise enough to preserve the Union we may for ages enjoy an advantage similar to that of an insulated situation. Europe is at a great distance from us. Her colonies in our vicinity will likely to continue too much disproportioned in strength to be able to give us any dangerous annoyance. Extensive military establishments cannot, in this position, be necessary to our security. . . . This is an idea not superficial or futile, but solid and weighty." Throughout the ante-bellum era only a few dozen diplomats and military professionals, such as General Winfield Scott and naval Lieutenant Matthew Maury, needed to think in terms of grand strategy. But the miniature army on the frontier and navy in the Mediterranean and western Pacific did such excellent duty that American settlers and merchants took their new frontiers

[12] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 194-346.

[13] Krepenivich and Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, which cites in turn Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: Norton, 1995), and Andrew Rogers, *Masters and Commanders: How Roosevelt, Churchill, Marshall and Alan Brooke Won the War in the West* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

for granted. Henry James did not wonder at that insouciance because, he wrote in 1879

> That generation which grew up with the century witnessed during a period of fifty years the immense, uninterrupted material development of the young Republic . . . there seems to be little room for surprise that it should have implanted a kind of superstitious faith in the grandeur of the country, its duration, its immunity from the usual troubles of earthly empires. . . . From this conception of the American future the sense of its having problems to solve was blissfully absent; there were no difficulties in the programme, no looming complication, no rocks ahead.[14]

Right around that year of 1879, however, responsible people in responsible posts in the United States just began to notice that the heretofore friendly strategic environment was in rapid flux. The industrial revolution was spreading through Europe and was launched in Japan. Revolutions in commerce, shipping, and communications were forging a global economic and military arena, as symbolized by bulk cargo oceanic steamships, the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable, the Transcontinental Railroad and Suez Canal of 1869, and the shift in 1876 of the global futures market for cereals from Danzig to the Chicago Board of Trade. In the decades to come, Britain and her many new challengers for naval and colonial power bumped up against U.S. interests and spheres of influence. The time had come to institutionalize grand strategy.

Chief among the responsible people who did so were Commodore Stephen B. Luce, who founded the Naval War College in 1884, Captain A.T. Mahan whom Luce recruited to teach the influence of sea power on history, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy who challenged Congress in 1890 to fund a modern two-ocean navy, the magnates of steel mills and shipyards who built the United States' first military-industrial complex, and Progressive publicists ranging from pastor Josiah Strong to politician Albert Beveridge, press mogul William Randolph Hearst, and pundit Herbert Croly. Thanks to all of the above, most Americans took in stride the Yankee imperialism beginning in 1898. That era's "great equation" of federal policies to promote defense, exports, sustainable growth, conservation, assimilation of immigrants, free enterprise with measures to check its worst abuses, and both secular and Social Gospel safety nets amounted to the United States' first articulated grand strategy, perhaps best personified by Theodore Roosevelt.[15] The only aspect of that strategy that

[14] Henry James, *Hawthorne* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1879), pp. 142-43.

[15] See the Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press publications by Robert Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters* (1977), Robert G. Albion, *Makers of Naval Policy, 1798-1947* (1980), and James C. Bradford, ed., *Admirals of the New Steel Navy* (1990); also Richard D. Challener, *Admirals, Generals, and American Foreign Policy 1898-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1973), Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion: A New View of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985), and Walter A. McDougall, *Let the Sea Make a Noise: A History of the North Pacific From Magellan to MacArthur* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

did not serve the nation well was its humanitarian, "white man's burden" notion to the effect that the American people possessed the calling, the means, and the wisdom to uplift foreign cultures.

What is more, that nation- or state-building component explains why I also deemed Progressive Imperialism the first in a new category of foreign policy traditions. For over the course of the twentieth century, U.S. policy elites, perceiving their nation increasingly threatened by wars and revolutions in a shrinking, global arena, ceased trying to keep the outside world from shaping their nation and instead began trying to reshape the world. The next new tradition was Wilsonianism which spiritualized and universalized the local, partly strategic humanitarian crusades of Progressive Imperialism and purported to do for the world what the United States had manifestly been unable to do for Cuba or the Philippines. Being essentially utopian, Wilsonianism was a grievous temptation and failure after both world wars. The upshot was another tradition, Containment, which proved slow, costly, and sometimes morally compromising. But since it was grounded in realism and periodically renewed by serious grand strategy—for instance, during the first terms of Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan—Containment prevailed.[16] The final new tradition, which sometimes stood alone but always co-existed with the others, was what I call Global Meliorism, the idea that the United States has not just a *destiny* as an *exemplar*, but a *mission* as an *actor*, to bestow peace, prosperity, human rights, and freedom as the American people understand those terms on the entire world. From Herbert Hoover to Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush national leaders have repeatedly formulated (or at least justified) grand strategies on the basis of global meliorist ideology. Hoover said the way to fight Communism in Russia was with food, not with guns. Kennedy's and Johnson's "best and brightest" said the way to defeat Communism in the Third World was to win the hearts and minds of South Vietnamese by offering them a better social and political revolution. George W. Bush said the way to defeat terrorism in the Muslim world was to drain the swamps of despair and disaffection by democratizing the Middle East. (Tony Blair, even now, spurns the expediency of a Machiavelli, Bismarck, and by implication Thatcher and Reagan, in favor of militant idealism because, he says, our cause "is just, right, and the only way the future of the world can work.")[17]

[16] On Eisenhower's Solarium exercise and the drafting of the New Look blueprint NSC 162/2 of Fall 1953; see Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University, 1998).

[17] Tony Blair, "Doctrine of the International Community: Ten Years Later," *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 4:2 (2009): pp. 5-14. Blair spoke in Chicago in April 1999 and again April 2009 when he declared "I remain adamantly in the same spot, metaphorically as well as actually, of ten years ago, that evening in this city. The statesmanship that went before regarded politics as a Bismarck or Machiavelli regarded it. It's all a power play; a matter, not of right and wrong, but of who's on our side, and our side defined by our interests, not our values. . . . I never thought such politics very sensible or practical. I think it even less so now. . . ."

My list of nineteenth and twentieth century U.S. foreign policy traditions—given a sufficiently liberal definition of terms—would seem to support the contention that the United States has a rich and varied experience with grand strategy. Its people possessed, if perhaps somewhat intuitively, a *de facto* grand strategy that not only ensured the nation spectacular growth, but was so low-maintenance as to be almost imperceptible beyond the tiny Departments of State, War, and Navy. In the latter nineteenth century the nation designed a *de jure* grand strategy that required more vigorous mobilization of federal resources to manage an increasingly urban industrial society at home and militant imperial rivalries abroad.

What followed was an era of global turmoil that began in 1898, escalated around 1911 with the Chinese and Mexican revolutions, turned total upon U.S. entry into the world war in 1917, and has for all practical purposes never ended. The American people hoped the era of global turmoil had ended during the 1920s, again in 1945-46, and again in the 1990s. But each time new threats and opportunities emanating from abroad compelled—or at least seemed to compel—the U.S. government to react, which meant it had to make some kind of geopolitical reading as to what the circumstances required. Hence, the historical record would seem to indicate, first, that the United States can and has embraced grand strategies (even during the eras once scorned as isolationist), second, that strategies based on realist premises have been mostly fruitful, and third, that strategies based on idealist premises have been mostly abortive.[18]

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Robert Kagan, the neoconservative heavyweight, does not agree. Indeed, he is evidently devoting the better part of a decade in his prime of life to a two-volume history of U.S. foreign relations specifically designed to debunk McDougall's book (while refusing to acknowledge in footnotes or anywhere else that McDougall's book even exists). *Dangerous Nation*, Kagan's first volume, covers the century down to 1898 during which neutrality, unilateralism, and reticence seemed to characterize U.S. foreign policy. On

[18] But wait, you may say, was not isolationism the "default mode" of the United States whenever a clear and present danger was not evident or, as in the 1930s, even when a clear and present danger should have been evident? That is what proponents of interventionist schools, be they Progressive Imperialist, Wilsonian or Global Meliorist, want us to believe. If we are not with them on some ambitious, always moral, foreign commitment, then we are selfish, stupid isolationists. But beginning with my research on the post-World War I era for my first book way back in the 1970s and culminating with my research for *Promised Land, Crusader State* in the mid-1990s, I was forced to conclude that U.S. foreign policy was never isolationist except for the years 1933-38. Indeed, the Republican administrations of the 1920s pursued a highly articulated grand strategy with sophisticated military, diplomatic, financial, and political components. It was wrecked by the Great Depression, but diplomatic historians now agree that Charles Evans Hughes, Frank Kellogg, Herbert Hoover, J. P. Morgan, etc., conceived of a strategy just as liberal and far more effective than Woodrow Wilson's.

the contrary, Kagan labors to argue, the American people have believed ever since their nation's inception in their mission to liberate the whole human race, not just by example but exertion abroad. In short, George Washington was a neo-con.[19] The sometimes explicit, but always implicit message of Kagan's books and columns is that the true and abiding U.S. grand strategy is to export democracy, free markets, and human rights in what amounts to universal regime-change. Now, there are prophecies of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth where swords are beat into plowshares and lions lie down with lambs. For a few years after the Cold War, there were also Hegelian prophecies of an end to history thanks to the ideas that conquered the world.[20] But grand strategy is not usually thought of as a faith-based initiative. Or does Kagan really believe the U.S. government knows how to pacify and develop Fallujah or Kandahar? If so, he ought to inspect how little billions of dollars in urban renewal have achieved over forty years in the United States' own inner cities. What is more, even if such Global Meliorism, with or without guns, were a viable option for terrorist sanctuaries under U.S. occupation, what strategic relevance can nation-building theory possibly have for such sources of geopolitical angst as Iran, China, and Russia?

Andrew Bacevich disagrees with my interpretation of the U.S. foreign policy traditions and grand strategies for the opposite reason than Kagan. While agreeing with us that American isolationism is a myth, Bacevich rejects both my emphasis on geopolitics and Kagan's emphasis on ideology in favor of an economic interpretation. Indeed, his paleo-conservative critique of what he calls the new U.S. militarism and empire revives the New Left revisionism of William Appleman Williams. That "Wisconsin" or "Open Door" school was not strictly Marxist, but it did advance a mono-causal economic theory for what Williams called "the tragedy of U.S. diplomacy." The real motive for U.S. foreign policy during all eras of history was not security or liberty, but the capitalist appetite for new markets, resources, and customers, at home and increasingly abroad. So the American Dream was real, but therein lay tragedy because in order to meet the growing expectations of a growing population the United States was ineluctably drawn to imperialism that belied its liberationist rhetoric. Keenly aware of the consumerism and seductive advertising lurking behind this national tragedy, Bacevich blames the United States' grand strategic folly on the iron triangle of business, political, and military elites who alone benefit from the nation's peripatetic crusades. Indeed, the statistics he cites on U.S. debt and over-extension suggest a Ponzi scheme at the end of its tether. In sum, the United States has indeed pursued a grand strategy ever since

[19] Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006). On the Founders see Kagan, "Neocon Nation: Neconservatism, c. 177," *World Affairs* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2008).

[20] See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), and Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

1776. But far from being ideological, benign, and destined to triumph, as Kagan suggests, it is material, malign, and destined to ruin.[21]

Christopher Layne, a paleo-conservative political scientist of libertarian leanings, is just as critical of U.S. imperial overstretch. But his excavation in search of the roots of our strategic overstretch and malaise discovers them, not in the post 9/11 era where crusading neocons lurked, nor in the post-Cold War era where the Lexus and Olive Tree glistened. On the contrary, Layne spies an essential continuity in U.S. grand strategy after and *before* 9/11, after and *before* the entire Cold War, even after and *before* World War II. He identifies the abiding U.S. grand strategy as one of "extra-regional hegemony" and locates its roots in the planning the Roosevelt administration initiated in 1940 and brought to maturity by 1944-45. What FDR's wartime brain trust, both civilian and military, were tasked to do and did, was to draft the blueprints for U.S. dominance over the security, economics, and ideologies of Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, well before Soviet intransigence gave them the added incentive of Containment.

Political science theories would not have predicted such behavior, given the lessons of history about the cost, risk, and ultimate futility of quests for hegemony. But the United States had the means and opportunity to bid for hegemony, and the Open Door (here Layne parallels Bacevich) provided the motive. The foreign policy and business establishments in the United States concluded from the era of the world wars that the nation's core values of liberty, peace, and ever-greater prosperity could never be truly secure until democracy and open markets prevailed everywhere. So they manipulated American politics and institutions to promote hegemony through global engagement, albeit under the guise of anti-hegemonic Deterrence, Modernization, Democratic or Liberal Regime theory. Eisenhower alone opposed the hegemonic consensus, asserts Layne, but he was isolated even within his own administration. The upshot, since the Realist theory of international relations is valid, was that U.S. hegemony invariably conjured into being opponents while obliging the imperial power to wage perpetual wars in the name of perpetual peace (if only to purchase the continued loyalty of clients), even where U.S. interests were only marginally engaged. So whereas the post-9/11 wars in the Muslim world might have driven the United States to

[21] Bacevich's scholarly evolution seems to have been inspired by his fierce loyalty to the U.S. military which, in turn, bred righteous anger over the damage done by the excessive demands made on the Army and Marines in particular since 9/11. Compare his *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2002), to *The New American Militarism: How American Are Seduced into War* (New York: Oxford University, 2005), and *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan, 2008). His theory about the elites manipulating grand strategy is reminiscent not only of William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, rev. ed. (1962), but of his contemporary, the sociologist C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University, 1956).

the limits of its financial and military strength, such a denouement was inevitable for a nation pursuing a grand strategy based on the delusion that empire pays for itself. Layne concludes with a survey of the grand strategies now available to the United States—Hegemony, Selective Engagement, Offshore Balancing, and Isolationism—and argues that the only one that would honestly fulfill the criteria of grand strategy with regard to priorities, ends, means, economy, asymmetrical advantage, and acceptable risk is Offshore Balancing. He would terminate U.S. security treaties with NATO, Japan, and South Korea, cease pestering China and Russia about their internal affairs, stand offshore of the Persian Gulf, and launch a crash R&D program to escape dependence on foreign oil. In sum, he recommends a return to the pre-1917 era of U.S. grand strategy.[22]

That so many analysts of the Realist school of international relations have soured on U.S. military assertion abroad, even in the wake of the first attack on the United States since Pearl Harbor, says plenty about how unpersuasive U.S. strategy has become. Barry Posen, Stephen Van Evera, and Stephen Walt, like Chris Layne former students of Kenneth Waltz, have all pleaded for a grand strategy based on restraint. So, too, has Colin Dueck, who characterized American strategic culture as uniquely prone to utopian ambitions and universal commitments sold to the public with lofty rhetoric and the promise of minimal cost, or "limited liability." Thus, writes Dueck, "It was an illusion to think that a stable, secure, and democratic Iraq could arise without a significant long-term U.S. investment of both blood and treasure. . . . But even after 9/11, the preference for limited liability in strategic affairs continued to weigh heavily on Bush." The Administration really believed Rumsfeld's boast that 9/11 gave America another World War II sort of opportunity "to refashion the world." Believing that siren's song, President Bush proceeded to replicate the worst features of Liberal Internationalism by "pursuing a set of extremely ambitious and idealistic foreign policy goals without initially providing the full or proportionate means to achieve those goals. In this sense, it must be said, George W. Bush was very much a Wilsonian."[23]

Dueck's historical survey echoes Layne's list of strategic choices. Following World War I, the United States could have opted for engagement through the League of Nations, disengagement, or limited engagement in the

[22] Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2006). Geir Lundestad's critical review at www.politicalreviewnet.com/polrev/reviews/DIPH/R_145_2 faults Layne for depicting U.S. strategy over many decades as one-dimensional and invulnerable to domestic political resistance. If so, then how can his recommended alternative of offshore-balancing be a realistic alternative? He also faults Layne for underestimating the seriousness of the Soviet confrontation and European eagerness for a U.S. commitment. Lundestad himself has referred to the U.S.-led Western bloc as "empire by invitation."

[23] Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, 2006); quote on p. 162.

European balance of power (military alliance with France and Britain). After World War II, the United States had four options: disengagement, rollback of Communism, an amicable spheres-of-influence deal with Stalin, or worldwide containment. After the Cold War, the United States could have chosen disengagement, balance of power, liberal internationalism, or hegemony. In every case, Dueck argues, the United States opted for limited-liability strategies and, in the wake of Iraq, are likely to do so again. Hence, he concludes, "the choice between a strategy of primacy and a strategy of liberal internationalism, which currently seems to characterize public debate over U.S. foreign policy, is almost beside the point. Neither strategy will work if Americans are unwilling to incur the full costs and risks that are implied in either case."[24]

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If the gloom-sayers are even partially right it would seem the United States has no good grand strategic options at present. Indeed, we may have none at all given that the global financial meltdown can only reinforce our "cheap hawk" proclivities, given that the Wilsonian moralistic conceit so dear to the nation's self-image obliges U.S. foreign policy to be (or pretend to be) a crusade to abolish grand strategy, given that our Constitution mandates frequent turnover in the executive branch, given that our checked and balanced, multi-branched system of government is either spastic or strait-jacketed by design, and given that those executive bureaucracies charged with strategic planning often seem more interested in thwarting each other than America's enemies. Just consider the sobering testimony offered by two smart, experienced veterans of strategic planning, Richard Betts and Leslie Gelb. According to Betts, no government, not least the United States, can really "do" grand strategy because nobody can accurately forecast the costs of strategic choices, or predict the outcomes of alternate choices, or determine the variables and stakes in a given competition or war, or control for the Clausewitzian friction and fog of battles both military and bureaucratic, or predict (much less counter) the reactions of adversaries, or surmount the Tocquevillian incompetence and impatience of democracies. According to Gelb, strategic planning can perversely work too well! In a large democracy like the United States, he observed during the Vietnam War, the process of bargaining among agencies and with the Congress tends to privilege what he called "Option B," the sort of incremental half-measures that meet the requirements of no coherent strategy at all.[25]

Finally, as Drezner wrote after the 2006 elections registered their verdict on President Bush's crusade, the American people found themselves back at

[24] Ibid., p. 171.

[25] Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security*, Fall 2000, pp. 5-50; Leslie H. Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979).

square one waiting for a new George Kennan who, like Samuel Beckett's Godot, never shows. But if the gloom-sayers are right, we are even worse off than that because even the "greatest generation" that was "present at the creation" of the Cold War architecture was not the role model we want to believe. For instance, Dueck has denounced the "cheap hawkery" that made the Truman Doctrine a risible bluff until the Korean War (itself partly a product of U.S. blunders). John Lewis Gaddis has long argued that NSC 68, the document that allegedly reversed the "cheap hawkery," was itself a deeply flawed blueprint for strategy.[26] Gaddis even regards Kennan's concept of Containment to have been myopic and idiosyncratic. Thomas Wright goes so far as to indict the whole 1940s cohort and believes the only lessons to be learned are from their mistakes.[27] To be sure, Eisenhower's 1953 strategic planning "for the long haul," expertly documented by Bowie and Immerman, enjoys a long overdue exemplary status. But however commendable Eisenhower's process, the "Strategies of Containment" are only of limited relevance because the correlation of forces, nature of the adversaries, and asymmetrical strengths and vulnerabilities were so different then than now. Just contrast Paul Nitze's analysis of Soviet intentions and capabilities in the 1950s with Andrew Krepinevich's "seven deadly scenarios" in the 2010s.[28] What is more, even though Containment ultimately brought the Cold War to a triumphant end without undermining our values, its cost in terms of lives, treasure, and economic opportunities was far more than the American people are willing or able to pledge.[29]

Not surprisingly, therefore, Drezner rejects all the strategic concepts advanced by the self-nominated candidates for Kennan's mantle, including Jeffrey Legro, Michael Mandelbaum, Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Benjamin Page and Marshall Bouton.[30] One could add to that list Francis Fukuyama and Amitai Etzioni,

[26] See the Gaddis commentary in Ernest R. May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* (Boston: St Martin's, 1993), p. 146. He asserts NSC 68 was not a strategy at all, or else a poor one, because it made all interests "vital" and thus made possible negotiations "only on the basis of Soviet capitulations." That in turn, transferred the power to define American interests to the Soviets themselves and made inevitable the militarization of an ideological conflict.

[27] Thomas Wright, "Learning the Right Lessons from the 1940s," in Drezner, *Avoiding Trivia*, pp.125-36. The lessons are: 1. Be flexible because "consistency" can lead to over-extension and imprudence; 2. Don't neglect bilateral diplomacy for which institutions are no substitute; 3. Secure and retain domestic legitimacy without which no strategy can be sustained; 4. Prioritize problems and try to solve them rather than over-emphasize process and institutions; 5. Manage expectations and appeal to the President for support.

[28] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *7 Deadly Scenarios: A Military Futurist Explores War in the 21st Century* (New York: Bantam, 2009).

[29] Derek Leebaert, *The Fifty-Year Wound: The True Price of America's Cold War Victory* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).

[30] Daniel W. Drezner, "The Grandest Strategy of Them All," *The Washington Post* (Dec. 17, 2006); Drezner is author of *All Politics is Global: Explaining International Regulatory Regimes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2007).

among others. Why do all these authoritative authors fall flat? Because none says anything very original. They just reflexively damn the Bush administration's hubris and poor execution while reaffirming human rights, democracy, and an open world economy as the proper goals of American strategy. Invariably, the result is some rhetorical hybrid reminiscent of Dr. Doolittle's fanciful Pushmi-pullyu, the beast with two heads and no rump. We are told, for instance, to be visionary yet pragmatic (Legro), ethical yet realistic (Lieven and Hulsman), realistic yet Wilsonian (Fukuyama), moral yet muscular (Eztioni), focused yet ambiguous and flexible (Drezner himself).[31]

World weary as I am, having witnessed so many disappointing and disillusioning cycles of politics and foreign policy, having acquired so much vicarious experience of human folly and forgetfulness from my study of history, I nurture no hope that a great burst of grand strategic creativity lies just ahead. Oh, this or a subsequent administration may make institutional reforms, such as insisting that the National Security Strategy document address resources and means instead of just goals, or reinventing the Eisenhower NSC structure with its Planning and Operations Coordinating boards. But otherwise, I incline to the wisdom of FPRI's Harvey Sicherman. Whenever I wax imaginative about the clever schemes of statesmen, past or present, Harvey assures me that I am giving them

[31] Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2005), defines the prerequisites for a paradigm shift in world views, arguing that they must be visionary but also pragmatic insofar as they recommend concrete steps to be taken. Mandelbaum, *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts as the World's Government in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), insists that the United States is the indispensable power, hence it cannot afford to starve its military of resources in favor of feeding its oil addiction and social entitlements. Lieven and Hulsman, *Ethical Realism and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), argues a Realist case said to reflect the ethical tradition of Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Niebuhr. American strategy should refocus on strengthening the home front and leading the world by example. Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University, 2006), calls for a "realistic Wilsonianism" expressed in a "multi-multilateralism" of overlapping international institutions rather than unilateral militarism. Ikenberry and Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Project on National Security, 2006) is billed as a "collective X article." The authors stress international law and institutions to channel U.S. power and a "concert of democracies" to promote human rights. Etzioni, *Security First: For a Muscular, Moral Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University, 2007), criticizes democratization and nation-building as far too expensive, uncertain, and ineffective to warrant priority. The United States ought instead to seek legitimacy for its exertion of power through multilateral enforcement institutions such as the Proliferation Security Initiative. Page and Bouton, *The Foreign Policy Disconnect: What Americans Want From Our Leaders But Don't Get*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006) is an outlier insofar as it agrees with Christopher Layne that U.S. business and foreign policy elites conspire to frustrate the common sense of the American people. But far from being libertarian, these authors advocate economic nationalism in the name of "fair trade."

way too much credit for knowing what they are doing or being able to do it. So whatever buzz words become the shorthand for a new American strategy, I expect the most we can hope for is that our national security agencies and their consulting firms just post on their walls the business strategist Richard Rumelt's list of ten strategic blunders and meditate on them every day.[32] They are:

1. Failure to recognize or take seriously the fact that resources are scarce
2. Mistaking strategic goals for strategy
3. Failure to recognize or state the strategic problem
4. Choosing unattainable or poor strategic goals
5. Failure to define the challenge competitively
6. Making false presumptions about one's competence
7. Loss of focus due to too many stakeholders and bureaucratic processes to satisfy
8. Inaccurately determining one's areas of competitive advantage
9. Failure to realize that few people have the cognitive skills needed for strategy
10. Failure to understand the adversary.

I would add to this list one more:

11. *Failure to understand ourselves.*

In his famous "Silent Majority speech," President Richard Nixon assured listeners that North Vietnam could not defeat the United States, "only Americans can do that." I suspect that were we to run our minds over the whole sweep of U.S. diplomatic and military history we could readily trace our nation's disasters and wasteful detours in good part to our own nation's foibles. They are legion. We are human. But chief among them is a tendency to be so dazzled by our own destiny and morality that we cannot see ourselves as others see us. So even as the American people must figure out how to frustrate our terrorist enemies and Great Power rivals in the era to come, so must we hearken to Edmund Burke. "Among precautions against ambition," he warned, "it may not be amiss to take one precaution against our own. I must fairly say, I dread our own power and own ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded. . . . [W]e may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard of power. But every other nation will think we shall abuse it. It is impossible but that, sooner or later,

[32] The ten "common strategy sins" as presented by Rumelt in a CSBA seminar on Sep. 25, 2007, cited by Krepinevich and Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence*, pp. 33-34.

this state of things must produce a combination against us which may end in our ruin.[33]

Grand strategy, whatever other ambitions it may serve, cannot aim at the abolition or obviation of grand strategy itself. That is why U.S. strategists, while devoting all their imagination to the prevention of specific dangers, cannot be about eliminating the possibility of deadly scenarios altogether. To cite a Samuel Huntington metaphor told me by Swarthmore Professor Jim Kurth, the most a wise statesman can do is imagine his ship of state on an infinite sea, with no port behind and no destination ahead, his sole responsibility being to weather the storms certain to come, and keep the ship on an even keel so long as he has the bridge.

[33] Burke quoted by Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, p. 204. The obverse of this collective self-satisfaction is what Toynbee called 'the mirage of immortality." At the height of a civilization its members "are prone to regard it, not as a night's shelter in the wilderness, but as the Promised Land, the goal of human endeavors" and thus invite their own destruction from decadence within and/or attack from without. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 301. Is America or the West an exception? Huntington cites Matthew Melko, *The Nature of Civilizations* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969), p. 155, who asks, "First, is Western Civilization a new species, in a class by itself, incomparably different from all other civilizations that have ever existed? Second, does its worldwide expansion threaten (or promise) to end the possibility of development of all other civilizations?" If the likely answer to either is no, then we had better guard against imagining ourselves immortal.